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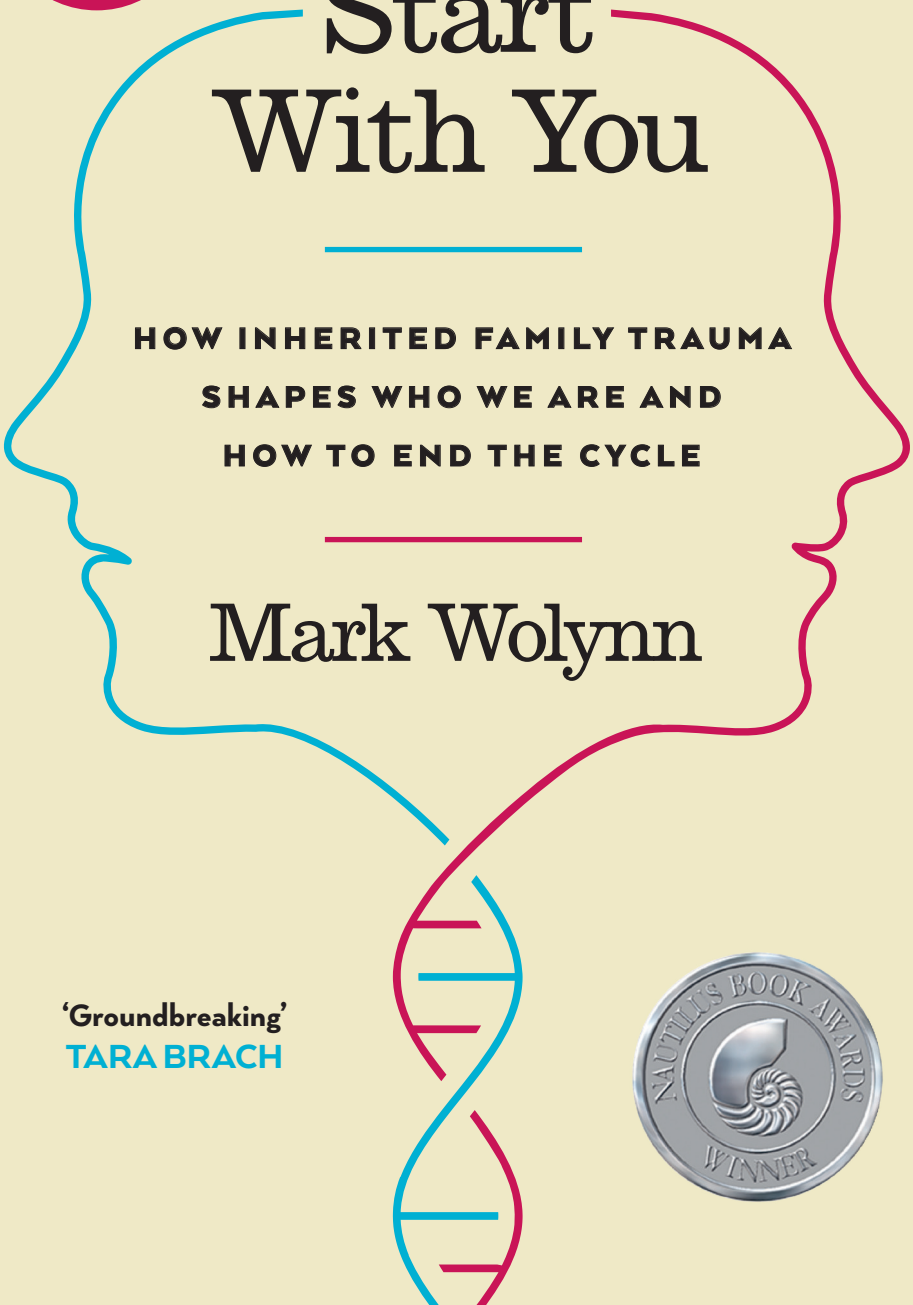
It Didn't Start With You

HOW INHERITED FAMILY TRAUMA SHAPES WHO WE ARE AND HOW TO END THE CYCLE

Mark Wolynn



'Groundbreaking'
TARA BRACH

IT DIDN'T START WITH YOU

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How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle

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To my late parents,
Marvin and Sandra, who carried the torch
forward from previous generations.
I'm grateful for all you've given me.

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Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakes.

—Carl Jung, *Letters, Vol. 1*

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Introduction:
The Secret Language of Fear

In a dark time, the eye begins to see . . .

—Theodore Roethke, "In a Dark Time"

This book is the fruit of a mission, one that has led me around the world, back home to my roots, and into a professional career that I never could have envisioned when this journey began. For more than thirty years, I have worked with individuals who have struggled with depression, anxiety, chronic illness, phobias, obsessive thoughts, PTSD, and other debilitating conditions. Many have come to me discouraged and disheartened after years of talk therapy, medication, and other interventions failed to uncover the source of their symptoms and allay their suffering.

What I've learned from my own experience, training, and clinical practice is that the answer may not lie within our own story as much as in the stories of our parents, grandparents, and even our great-grandparents. The latest scientific research, now making headlines, also tells us that the effects of trauma can pass from one generation to the next. This "bequest" is what's known as *inherited family trauma*, and emerging evidence suggests that it is a very real phenomenon. Pain does not always dissolve on its own or diminish with time. Even if the person who suffered the original trauma has died, even if his or her story lies submerged in years of silence, fragments of life experience, memory,

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and body sensation can live on, as if reaching out from the past to find resolution in the minds and bodies of those living in the present.

How does this happen? As you'll learn in this book, memories of trauma are imprinted in our parents' and grandparents' sperm and egg cells. The feelings and sensations of the trauma—specifically the stress response, the way the genes express—can pass on to the children and grandchildren, affecting them in a similar way, even though they didn't personally experience the trauma. As a result, we can be born with altered brains that prepare us biologically to cope with traumas that are similar to the ones our parents and grandparents experienced.

What you'll read in the pages that follow is a synthesis of empirical observations from my practice as director of the Family Constellation Institute in San Francisco and the latest findings in neuroscience, epigenetics, and the science of language. It also reflects my professional training with Bert Hellinger, the renowned German psychotherapist, whose approach to family therapy demonstrates the psychological and physical effects of inherited family trauma on multiple generations.

Much of this book focuses on identifying inherited family patterns—the fears, feelings, and behavior we've unknowingly adopted that keep the cycle of suffering alive from generation to generation—and also how to end this cycle, which is the core of my work. You may learn, as I did, that many of these patterns don't belong to us; they've merely been borrowed from others in our family history. Why is this? I strongly believe that it is because a story that needs to be told can finally be brought to light. Let me share my own.

I never set out to create a method for overcoming fear and anxiety. It all began the day I lost my vision. I was in the throes of my first ocular migraine. No real physical pain to speak of—just a cyclone of dark terror, within which my vision was obscured. I was thirty-four years old and stumbling around my office in the murk, fingering the desk phone for the 911 buttons. An ambulance would soon be on its way.

An ocular migraine is generally not serious. Your vision becomes muddled, but usually returns to normal in about an hour. You just don't always know that while it's happening. But for me, the ocular migraine

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was just the beginning. Within weeks, the vision in my left eye began to disappear. Faces and road signs soon became a gray blur.

The doctors informed me that I had central serous retinopathy, a condition without a cure, its cause unknown. Fluid builds up under the retina and then leaks, causing scarring and blurring in the visual field. Some folks, the 5 percent with the chronic form mine had turned into, become legally blind. The way things were going, I was told to expect that both eyes would be affected. It was just a matter of time.

The doctors were unable to tell me what caused my vision loss and what would heal it. Everything I tried on my own—vitamins, juice fasts, hands-on healing—all seemed to make things worse. I was flummoxed. My greatest fear was unfolding in front of me and I was helpless to do anything about it. Blind, unable to take care of myself, and all alone, I'd fall apart. My life would be ruined. I'd lose my will to live. I'd be annihilated.

I replayed the scenario over and over in my head. The more I thought about it, the deeper the hopeless feelings embedded in my body. I was sinking into sludge. Each time I tried to dig myself out, my thoughts circled back to images of being all alone, helpless, ruined, and annihilated. What I didn't know then was that the very words *alone*, *helpless*, *ruined*, and *annihilated* were part of my personal language of fear. They echoed traumas that took place in my family history before I was born. Unbridled and unrestrained, these words reeled in my head and rattled my body.

I wondered why I gave my thoughts such power. Other people had adversity far worse than mine and they didn't dwell in the depths like this. What was it about me that stayed so deeply entrenched in fear? It would be years before I could answer that question.

Back then, all I could do was leave. I left my relationship, my family, my business, my city—everything I knew. I wanted answers that couldn't be found in the world I was part of—a world where many people seemed to be confused and unhappy. I had only questions, and little desire to carry on with life as I knew it. I handed my business (a successful events company) over to someone I had literally just met, and

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off I went, east—as far east as I could go—until I reached Southeast Asia. I wanted to be healed. I just had no idea what that would look like.

I read books and studied with the teachers who wrote them. Whenever I heard that there might be someone who could help me—some old woman in a hut, some laughing man in a robe—I showed up. I joined training programs and chanted with gurus. One guru said, to those of us gathered to hear him speak, that he wanted to surround himself with only "finders." Seekers, he said, remained just that—in a constant state of seeking.

I wanted to be a finder. I meditated for hours each day. I fasted for days at a time. I brewed herbs and battled the fierce toxins that I imagined had invaded my tissues. All the while, my eyesight continued to worsen and my depression deepened.

What I failed to realize at the time is that when we try to resist feeling something painful, we often protract the very pain we're trying to avoid. Doing so is a prescription for continued suffering. There's also something about the action of searching that blocks us from what we seek. The constant looking outside of ourselves can keep us from knowing when we hit the target. Something valuable can be going on inside us, but if we're not tuning in, we can miss it.

"What aren't you willing to see?" the healers prodded, provoking me to look deeper. How could I know? I was in the dark.

One guru in Indonesia shined the light a bit brighter for me when he asked, "Who do you think you are not to have eye problems?" He went on: "Perhaps Johan's ears don't hear as well as Gerhard's, and maybe Eliza's lungs aren't as strong as Gerta's. And Dietrich doesn't walk nearly as well as Sebastian." (Everyone was either Dutch or German at this particular training program and seemed to be struggling with one chronic condition or another.) Something got through. He was right. Who was I not to have eye problems? It was arrogant for me to argue with reality. Like it or not, my retina was scarred and my vision was blurred, but I—the "me" underneath it all—was beginning to feel calm. No matter what my eye was doing, it no longer had to be the defining factor for how I was doing.

To deepen the learning, this guru had us spend seventy-two

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hours—three days and nights—blindfolded and earplugged, meditating on a small cushion. Each day, we were given a small bowl of rice to eat and only water to drink. No sleep, no getting up, no lying down, no communicating. Going to the bathroom meant raising your hand and being escorted to a hole in the ground in the dark.

The goal of this madness was just that—to intimately come to know the madness of the mind by observing it. I learned how my mind continually taunted me with worst-case-scenario thinking and the lie that if I just worried hard enough, I could insulate myself from what I feared most.

After this experience and others like it, my inner vision began to clear a bit. My eye, however, stayed the same; the leaking and scarring continued. On many levels, having a vision problem is a great metaphor. I eventually learned that it was less about what I could or couldn't see and more about the way I saw things. But that wasn't when I turned the corner.

It was during the third year of what I now call my "vision quest" that I finally got what I was looking for. By this time, I was doing a lot of meditation. The depression had mostly lifted. I could spend countless hours in silence just being with my breath or body sensations. That was the easy part.

One day, I was waiting in line to have a *satsang*—a meeting with a spiritual master. I had been waiting for hours in the white robe that everyone in line at the temple wore. It was now my turn. I was expecting the master to acknowledge my dedication. Instead, he looked right through me and saw what I couldn't. "Go home," he said. "Go home and call your mother and your father."

What? I was livid. My body shook with anger. Clearly, he misread me. I no longer needed my parents. I had outgrown them. I had given up on them long ago, traded them in for better parents, divine parents, spiritual parents—all the teachers, gurus, and wise men and women who were guiding me to the next level of awakening. What's more, with several years of misguided therapy under my belt, of beating pillows and tearing cardboard effigies of my parents to smithereens, I believed I had

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already "healed" my relationship with them. I decided to ignore his advice.

And yet something struck a chord inside me. I couldn't quite let go of what he had said. I was finally beginning to understand that no experience is ever wasted. Everything that happens to us has merit, whether we recognize the significance of it or not. Everything in our lives ultimately leads us somewhere.

Still, I was determined to keep the illusion about who I was intact. Being an accomplished meditator was all I had to cling to. So I sought a meeting with another spiritual master—one, I was sure, who would set the record straight. This man imbued hundreds of people a day with his heavenly love. Surely he would see me for the deeply spiritual person I imagined myself to be. Again, I waited a full day until it was my turn. I was now at the front of the line. And then it happened. Again. The same words. "Call your parents. Go home and make peace with them."

This time I heard what was being said.

The great teachers know. The truly great ones don't care whether you believe in their teachings or not. They present a truth, then leave you with yourself to discover your own truth. Adam Gopnik writes about the difference between gurus and teachers in his book *Through the Children's Gate*: "A guru gives us himself and then his system; a teacher gives us his subject and then ourselves."

The great teachers understand that where we come from affects where we go, and that what sits unresolved in our past influences our present. They know that our parents are important, regardless of whether they are good at parenting or not. There's no way around it: The family story is *our* story. Like it or not, it resides within us.

Regardless of the story we have about them, our parents cannot be expunged or ejected from us. They are in us and we are part of them—even if we've never met them. Rejecting them only distances us further from ourselves and creates more suffering. Those two teachers could see it. I couldn't. My blindness was both literal and figurative. Now I was beginning to wake up, mostly to the fact that I had left a huge mess back home.

For years, I had judged my parents harshly. I imagined myself to be

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more capable, far more sensitive and human, than they. I blamed them for all the things I believed were wrong with my life. Now I had to return to them to restore what was missing in me—my vulnerability. I was now coming to realize that my ability to receive love from others was linked to my ability to receive my mother's love.

Still, taking in her love was not going to be easy. I had such a deep break in the bond with my mother that being held by her felt like being squeezed in a bear trap. My body would tighten in on itself as if to create a shell she couldn't penetrate. This wound affected every aspect of my life—especially my ability to stay open in a relationship.

My mother and I could go months without speaking. When we did speak, I'd find a way, through either my words or my armored body language, to discount the warm feelings she showed me. I appeared cold and distant. Conversely, I accused her of not being able to see me or hear me. It was an emotional dead end.

Determined to heal our broken relationship, I booked a flight home to Pittsburgh. I had not seen my mother in several months. As I walked up the driveway, I could feel my chest tighten. I wasn't sure our relationship could be repaired; I had so many raw feelings inside. I prepared myself for the worst, playing out the scenario in my mind: She would hold me and I, wanting only to soften in her arms, would do just the opposite. I would turn to steel.

And that's pretty much what happened. Embraced in a hug I could barely endure, I could hardly breathe. Yet I asked her to keep holding me. I wanted to learn, from the inside out, my body's resistance, where I tightened, what sensations arose, how I would shut down. It wasn't new information. I had seen this pattern mirrored in my relationships. Only this time, I wasn't walking away. My plan was to heal this wound at the source.

The longer she held me, the more I thought I would burst. It was physically painful. Pain would meld into numbness, and numbness into pain. Then, after many minutes, something gave. My chest and belly began to quake. I began to soften, and, in the weeks that followed, I continued to soften.

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It was in one of our many conversations during this time that she shared—almost in an offhanded way—an event that occurred before I was two. My mom had to be hospitalized for three weeks for gall bladder surgery. With this insight, I began piecing together what was going on inside me. While we were separated, an unconscious tightening had taken root inside my body. When she returned home, I had stopped trusting her care. I was no longer vulnerable to her. Instead, I pushed her away, and would continue to do so for the next thirty years. The fear that I would be "all alone" finally began to make sense.

Another early event may have contributed to the fear I carried that my life would suddenly be ruined. My mother told me that she experienced a difficult labor while giving birth to me—one in which the doctor used forceps. As a result, I was born with extensive bruising and a partially collapsed skull, not uncommon with a forceps delivery. My mother revealed with regret that my appearance made it difficult for her even to hold me at first. Her story resonated, and helped to explain the feeling of being ruined that I knew deep inside. Specifically, traumatic memories from my birth that had submerged in my body would resurface whenever I "gave birth" to a new project or presented new work in public.

And then there was one more event—one that shook me to my core. In one of my last conversations with my mother before she passed away, I learned that during her entire pregnancy with me, she would intentionally roll herself down a flight of stairs on her belly, hoping to induce a spontaneous abortion. Hearing this, I could barely respond. The air in my lungs couldn't force out the words. Now I understood where the word *annihilated* came from. That's what was happening to me in the womb.

Just having these understandings brought me peace. They also, in an unexpected way, brought the two of us closer.

Here's how my father and I got closer. Living alone in a small, ramshackle apartment—the same one he'd lived in since my parents divorced when I was thirteen—my father, a former marine sergeant and construction worker, never bothered to renovate his own place. Old

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tools, bolts, screws, nails, and rolls of electrical and duct tape were strewn throughout the rooms and hallways—just as they had always been. As we stood together in a sea of rusty iron and steel, I told him how much I missed him. The words seemed to evaporate into empty space. He didn't know what to do with them.

I had always craved a close relationship with my father, yet neither he nor I knew how to make it happen. This time, however, we kept talking. I told him that I loved him and that he was a good father. I shared the memories I had of things he did for me when I was small. I could feel him listening to what I was saying, even though his actions—shrugging his shoulders, changing the subject—indicated he was not. It took many weeks of talking and sharing memories. During one of our lunches together, he looked directly into my eyes and said, "I didn't think you ever loved me." I could barely breathe. It was clear that great pain welled in both of us. In that moment, something broke open. It was our hearts. Sometimes, the heart must break in order to open. Eventually, we began to express our love for each other. I was now seeing the effects of trusting the words of the teachers and returning home to heal with my parents.

For the first time I could remember, I was able to let myself receive my parents' love and care—not in the way I had once expected it, but in the way they could give it. Something opened in me. It didn't matter how they could or couldn't love me. What mattered was how I could receive what they had to give. They were the same parents they'd always been. The difference was in me. I was falling in love with them.

The early events with my mother, along with similar traumas I inherited from my family history—specifically, the fact that three of my grandparents had lost their mothers at an early age, and the fourth had lost her father as an infant (as well as her mother's attention amid the grief)—helped to forge my secret language of fear. The words *alone*, *helpless*, *ruined*, and *annihilated*, and the feelings that had accompanied them, were finally losing their power to lead me astray. I was being granted a new life, and my renewed relationship with my parents was a large part of it.

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Since writing the first version of this book, my mother has passed away. However, during the last few decades of her life, we were able to reestablish a tender connection. Her love, which once felt invasive and grating, now felt calming and restorative.

I was also lucky to have sixteen close years with my father before he died. In the dementia that dominated the last four years of his life, my father taught me perhaps the most profound lesson about vulnerability and love I have ever learned. Together, we met in that place beyond thought, beyond the mind, where only the deepest love dwells.

During my travels, I had many great teachers. When I look back, however, it was my eye—my stressed-out, beleaguered, terror-producing eye—that led me halfway around the world, back to my parents, through the morass of family trauma, and finally back to my heart. My eye was, hands down, the greatest teacher of them all.

Somewhere along the way, I had even stopped thinking about my eye and worrying about whether it would improve or worsen. I no longer expected to be able to see clearly again. Somehow, that stopped being important. Not long afterward, my vision returned. I hadn't expected it to. I hadn't even needed it to. I had learned to be okay no matter what my eye was doing.

Today my vision is twenty-twenty, even though my ophthalmologist swears that with the amount of scarring I still have on my retina, I shouldn't be able to see. He just shakes his head and postulates that somehow the light signals must be ricocheting and bypassing the fovea, the central area of the retina.

As with many stories of healing and transformation, what started out looking like adversity was actually grace in disguise. Ironically, after scouring the distant corners of the planet for answers, I found that the greatest resources for healing were already inside me just waiting to be excavated.

Ultimately, healing is an inside job. Thankfully, my teachers led me back to my parents, and home to myself. Along the way I uncovered the stories in my family history that ultimately brought me peace. Out of

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gratitude and a newfound sense of freedom, it became my mission to help others discover this freedom for themselves.

It was through language that I entered the world of psychology. Both as a student and then as a clinician, I had little interest in tests and theories and models of behavior. Instead, I heard language. I developed listening techniques, and taught myself to hear what people were saying behind their complaints, beneath their old stories. I learned to help them identify the specific words that led to the origin of their pain. And though some theorists postulate that language goes missing during trauma, I've seen firsthand again and again that this language is never lost. It roams the unconscious realms, waiting to be rediscovered.

It's no accident that for me language is a potent tool of healing. For as far back as I can remember, language has been my teacher, my way of organizing and understanding the world. I've written poetry since I was an adolescent, and will drop everything (well, almost everything) when a surge of urgent language insists on being born. I know that on the other side of that surrender are insights that would otherwise be unavailable to me. In my own process, locating the words *alone*, *helpless*, *ruined*, and *annihilated* was essential.

In many ways, healing from trauma is akin to creating a poem. Both require the right timing, the right words, and the right image. When these elements align, something meaningful is set into motion that can be felt in the body. To heal, our pacing must be in tune. If we arrive too quickly at an image, it might not take root. If the words that comfort us arrive too early, we might not be ready to take them in. If the words aren't precise, we might not hear them or resonate with them at all.

Over the course of my practice as a teacher and workshop leader, I've combined the insights and methods gained from my training in inherited family trauma with my knowledge of the crucial role of language. I call this the *core language approach*. Using specific questions, I help people discover the root cause behind the physical and emotional

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symptoms that keep them mired. Uncovering the right language not only exposes the trauma, it also unveils the tools and images needed for healing. In using this method, I've witnessed deep-rooted patterns of depression, anxiety, and emptiness shift in a flash of insight.

The vehicle for this journey is language, the buried language of our worries and fears. It's likely that this language has lived inside us our whole lives. It may have originated with our parents, or even generations ago with our great-grandparents. Our core language insists on being heard. When we follow where it leads and hear its story, it has the power to defuse our deepest fears.

Along the way, we're likely to meet family members both known and unknown. Some have been dead for years. Some aren't even related, but their suffering or cruelty may have altered the course of our family's destiny. We might even uncover a secret or two hidden in stories that have long been laid to rest. But regardless of where this exploration takes us, my experience suggests that we'll arrive at a new place in our lives, with a greater sense of freedom in our bodies and an ability to be more at peace with ourselves.

Throughout this book, I have drawn on the stories of the people I've worked with in my workshops, trainings, and individual sessions. The case details are real, but to protect their privacy, I have changed their names and other identifying characteristics. I am deeply grateful to them for letting me share the secret language of their fears, for their trust in me, and for allowing me to hear what's essential beneath their words.

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Part I

The Web of Family Trauma

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Chapter 1

Traumas Lost and Found

Please note, this chapter contains graphic descriptions of self-harming behaviour.

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

—William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

A well-documented feature of trauma, one familiar to many, is our inability to articulate what happens to us. Not only do we lose our words, but something happens with our memory as well. During a traumatic incident, our thought processes can become scattered and disorganized in such a way that we no longer recognize the memories as belonging to the original event. Instead, fragments of memory, dispersed as images, body sensations, and words, are stored in our unconscious and can become activated later by anything even remotely reminiscent of the original experience. Once they are triggered, it is as if an invisible rewind button has been pressed, causing us to reenact aspects of the original trauma in our day-to-day lives. Unconsciously, we could find ourselves reacting to certain people, events, or situations in old, familiar ways that echo the past.

Sigmund Freud identified this pattern more than one hundred years ago. Traumatic reenactment, or "repetition compulsion," as Freud called it, is an attempt of the unconscious to replay what's unresolved, so we can "get it right." This unconscious drive to relive past events could be one of the mechanisms at work when families repeat unresolved traumas in future generations.

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Freud's contemporary Carl Jung also believed that what remains unconscious does not dissolve but resurfaces in our lives as fate or fortune. Whatever is not conscious, he said, will be experienced as fate. In other words, we're likely to keep repeating our unconscious patterns until we bring them into the light of awareness. Both Jung and Freud noted that whatever is too difficult to process does not fade away on its own but is stored in our unconscious.

Freud and Jung each observed how fragments of previously blocked, suppressed, or repressed life experience would show up in the words, gestures, and behaviors of their patients. For decades to follow, therapists would see such clues as slips of the tongue, accident patterns, or dream images as messengers shining a light into the unspeakable and unthinkable regions of their clients' lives.

Recent advances in imaging technology have allowed researchers to unravel the brain and bodily functions that "misfire" or break down during overwhelming episodes. Bessel van der Kolk is a Dutch psychiatrist known for his research on posttraumatic stress. He explains that during a trauma, the speech center shuts down, as does the medial prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for experiencing the present moment. He describes the *speechless terror* of trauma as the experience of being at a *loss for words*, a common occurrence when brain pathways of remembering are hindered during periods of threat or danger. "When people relive their traumatic experiences," he says, "the frontal lobes become impaired and, as [a] result, they have trouble thinking and speaking. They no longer are capable of communicating to either themselves or to others precisely what's going on."[1]

Still, all is not silent: words, images, and impulses that fragment following a traumatic event reemerge to form a secret language of suffering we carry with us. Nothing is lost. The pieces have just been rerouted.

Emerging trends in psychotherapy are now beginning to point beyond the traumas of the individual to include traumatic events in the

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family and social history as a part of the whole picture. Tragedies varying in type and intensity—such as abandonment, suicide, and war, or the early death of a child, parent, or sibling—can send shock waves of distress cascading from one generation to the next. Recent developments in the fields of cellular biology, neuroscience, epigenetics, and developmental psychology underscore the importance of exploring at least three generations of family history in order to understand the mechanism behind patterns of trauma and suffering that repeat.

I'd like to take you with me now into the past, thirty or so years ago, to a time when I was working with many self-injurers. One case would change my life forever. It was there where I learned how to listen for the language of inherited trauma.

Sarah was a twenty-four-year-old self-injurer who'd been cutting herself since she was fifteen. Different than any other self-injurer I'd ever worked with, Sarah would harm herself in an extreme way, cutting so deeply into her arms, legs, and abdomen with a razor blade that she'd often hit a vein and would nearly bleed to death. Her parents, terrified they'd lose her, would rush her to the hospital where she'd be placed in a psych ward for three or four weeks at a time.

I wondered why Sarah did this. I'd worked with many other cutters, but the lacerations they made were far more superficial. Why such deep lacerations? What was wanting to be communicated here?

One day, after Sarah was released from the hospital, I asked her to show me how she cut. I gave her my pen and asked her to imagine she was holding her razor blade. As she slid it across her bicep, her eyes began to glaze over. I could see she was dissociating.

"What's that thought, that feeling right there, Sarah?"

"I . . . I don't deserve to live."

For a brief second, her words dazed me. Here I was looking at a young woman whose life had just begun, and she was telling me she should die.

"What have you done, Sarah? Did you take someone's life? Did you cause an accident? Did you break up with someone who took his life?"

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She shook her head sideways and looked down at her lap. "No. Nothing like that."

I was confused. I'd been working with Sarah for several weeks at that point. I'd taken her full history, at least everything I knew to look for at the time. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Nothing I could tell that would cause this.

She had a loving relationship with both of her parents. She felt supported by them, cared for, loved, accepted. She could lean into them and go to either one for a hug or for words of encouragement. Her attachment with her mother was solid. It was safe and secure. I'd rarely worked with anyone who had such a wholesome and nurturing childhood.

Then, out of the blue, I asked: "Tell me about your grandparents. Did something happen there?" I wasn't sure why I was asking that, but I had a sense it might lead me to the right place.

Sarah went still. Her eyes widened. Then she dropped the bomb.

"My grandmother. My father's mother. She was an alcoholic. She was driving drunk and crashed the car into a phone pole. My grandfather was in the passenger seat. He went through the windshield, got cut on the glass, and bled to death before the ambulance could get there."

Lacerated. Cut. Bled to death. Deserving to die. The pieces were beginning to come together.

"Sarah, who felt she deserved to die?"

"My grandmother . . . she would have felt that way." Sarah's breathing became jagged. She had a faraway look in her eyes.

"That's right, Sarah. It was her. Not you. Your grandmother felt *she* didn't deserve to live."

"What happened to her after that?" I asked. "How old was your father back then?"

"She drank all the time after that. My father was twelve. It was terrible for him. He lost his dad and pretty much his mother, too. My dad hated her after that. She died when he was twenty. He never forgave her."

It all finally made sense. When Sarah felt she didn't deserve to live, she was reliving her grandmother's feeling, deserving to die for taking another's life—in this case, the life of her beloved.

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